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50TH ANNIVERSARY OF WAR ON POVERTY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Washington (Mr. HECK) for 5 minutes.

Mr. HECK of Washington. Mr. Speaker, 50 years ago this week, in this very Chamber, President Lyndon Johnson declared an "unconditional war on poverty." The mission the President outlined was grand, but his goal for each and every American was modest:

Help them fulfill their basic hopes—their hopes for a fair chance to make good; their hopes for fair play under the law; their hopes for a full-time job on full-time pay; their hopes for a decent home for their family in a decent community; their hopes for a good school for their children with good teachers; and their hopes for security when faced with sickness or unemployment or old age.

Fifty years later, the results speak for themselves:

The number of children living in poverty has dropped by 10 percent; the number of seniors living in poverty has plummeted by 32 percent; tens of millions of Americans have health insurance because of Medicare and Medicaid; the percentage of adults completing high school has skyrocketed from 56 percent to 88 percent; the share of women in the workforce has increased from 42 percent to 64 percent; and each and every single day, millions of school children go to school with full stomachs because of nutrition assistance.

We have much as a Nation we can be proud of; and the best way, the very best way we can celebrate and honor that progress is to rededicate ourselves to the challenges remaining. Because the truth of the matter is there are still too many Americans out of work, and there are still too many Americans working in jobs that don't pay enough to raise a family, and there are still too many Americans working harder for less.

I don't pretend that there are easy solutions to these problems. There is no cure-all, there is no silver bullet Congress can fire, but we simply cannot stand down; and we cannot, as President Johnson warned, "fritter and fumble away our opportunity in needless, senseless quarrels between Democrats and Republicans."

Sound familiar?

So, Mr. Speaker, on this 50th anniversary of the start of the war on poverty, it comes down to one simple question we should have the courage to ask ourselves: Are we doing everything we reasonably can to strengthen the middle class and help those working to get into it? Let me repeat that. Are we doing everything we reasonably can to strengthen the middle class and help those working to get into it? And I think we should also have the courage to answer that question honestly, and I think we all know the answer. It is "no." But we also all know that we can. That is the question of our time.

The question of the day is whether or not we are going to help in this way by

extending unemployment compensation benefits. The business case for this is exceedingly strong. The fact of the matter is that there are three people looking for work for every job available. The fact of the matter is that long-term unemployment is nearly twice as high as it was at each of the times that we ended emergency unemployment compensation over the last couple of decades. The business case for this is very strong, for those 1.3 million people already affected and the 2.6 million or so or more that will be affected in this calendar year. The business case is very strong.

There are those, of course, who will suggest that there are those who abuse unemployment compensation. I am not going to quibble about that, but I am going to reject the principle that Americans don't want to work, don't need to work, and that we are not hardwired to work, and I can prove it to you. I can absolutely prove it to you. Stop right now and ask yourself, what is the first thing you ask someone when you meet them?

"What do you do?"

We define ourselves by our work. It gives us pride. It helps us support our family. It makes our communities and neighborhoods stronger. Americans want to work. And when they cannot, we ought to be there to help them. We can, and we should.

MARKING 50 YEARS OF THE WAR ON POVERTY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. SWALWELL) for 3½ minutes.

Mr. SWALWELL of California. Mr. Speaker, 50 years ago, President Johnson declared in this Chamber the war on poverty, and this is one war that we must continue to wage.

I want to thank my neighbor in Alameda County who represents Oakland and San Leandro and Alameda and Berkeley, Congresswoman BARBARA LEE, who is Congress' greatest champion today to continue fighting President Johnson's war on poverty, and I am grateful to have a mentor in Congresswoman LEE who has guided and helped me as I have worked to do my part.

Since President Johnson's declaration, we have made real progress. Using an accurate measurement of who is poor in America shows we have cut the rate from 25.8 percent in 1967 to 16 percent in 2012, reducing by millions the number of Americans who are poor. Unfortunately, this war is not yet won. Almost 50 million Americans still live in poverty, including over 13 million children. In such an abundant society as ours, there is only one word to describe these stark facts, "unconscionable," and we can do better.

This Congress should make it a priority to help the poor, the economically downtrodden, and the jobless. Their path to economic opportunity

still remains dim. But this Congress, the people in this House, can be their light. If we are going to win the war on poverty, there are many battles today that we must win:

First, we should start by extending unemployment insurance now and not putting 1.3 million Americans out in the cold;

Second, we need to raise our minimum wage so those working hard and trying to earn a living can actually do so;

Third, we must fight harsh cuts to SNAP and Head Start to make sure everyone has equal opportunity.

These are just a few of the small battles that we must win right now in the larger war on poverty.

This is no time to turn back or to retreat. This is a time for a surge in our war against poverty. Millions of Americans, including children, are counting on us, and we must ask ourselves a few questions:

Has this war been won?

Has poverty been eradicated across America?

And is our middle class built out?

If the answer to any of these questions is "no," then we know what we must continue to do. We must fight on, and we must keep fighting until we win the war on poverty.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 11 o'clock and 22 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker at noon.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Patrick J. Conroy, offered the following prayer:

Loving God, we give You thanks for giving us another day.

At the beginning of this new day, we are grateful as individuals and as a Nation for the blessings we have been given.

We ask Your blessing upon the Members of this people's House. May they anticipate the opportunities and difficulties that are before them, and before so many Americans, with steadfast determination to work together toward solutions that will benefit their countrymen.

Grant that they be worthy of the responsibilities they have been given by their constituents and truly the people You have called them to be.

May the walls of disagreement that have divided this assembly be put aside and replaced with a spirit of respect